

# Lifting Safety

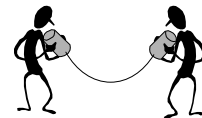


Few things will slow a person down - or lay them up - as fast as back pain will. Every day we lift objects that have the potential to leave us injured, unless we take proper precautions. Regardless of how heavy an object is, always remember to use proper lifting techniques.

Before you begin to lift something, ask your self if there's not another method available to get this job done. Can it be pushed, pulled, or rolled? Is there a mechanical aid available to make the job easier? There are now on the market, super slick pads (the TV ad shows a woman moving a full-sized automobile with one hand) that can be used - and they do work! Try an internet search for "super sliders" if you don't know what I'm talking about.

In many cases, it comes down to, simply, that a heavy object must be lifted. In that case, we suggest you use the following tips to decrease your chances of back injuries:

1. (And I do mean "#1") Plan your work; check out your path beforehand. Avoid walking on slippery or uneven surfaces when carrying something. And make sure your path is clear of objects over which you could trip or fall.
2. Ask ... for ... assistance. (*Whew, that was hard to say.*) Too often, we (esp. guys) try to lift objects that just are too heavy for us. It's no disgrace to ask someone else to lend a hand.
3. Find and maintain firm footing. A slip of the foot can hurt as much as a slip of the tongue; and can result in an injury faster than you can say Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious. Assuming, of course, that you can say it in the first place.
4. Use handles, gripping area, or lifting tools if available. This will help you to keep control of the object while lifting.
5. "Leverage" is more important here than in your stock portfolio. Keep your back straight. If you're lifting with your back bent, you're lifting the object



**plus** about  $\frac{1}{2}$  of your body weight! You and the object being lifted should, together, become a **POLE** - as close to straight up and down as possible.

6. Keep your elbows tucked in. This puts the weight on your shoulders, not your vertebrae or ribs. When the weight - stress - is put on your back or ribs, you risk an injury. Remember, be a Pole.
7. "Hold me close!" Keep the load close to your body. Lifting is, really, all about leverage. If everything is in a straight line up-and-down (remember the Pole?), the lift will be easier on you. If not, if your back is bent, if your elbows are sticking out, **OR** if you hold the object away from you, instead of forming a Pole, you create a triangle and the force of the weight wrenches on your back.
8. Tighten your stomach muscles and exhale as you lift. Your abdominal and back muscles form a band around your middle. When you tighten your stomach muscles, you clench down on your spine, thus providing additional support.

9. Lift smoothly; don't jerk. Snatching an object quickly works great for band aids; it's horrible for lifting. Jerking on a weight transfers the force to your body in a sudden extreme. Your back is not prepared for this sudden application of force. Remember the karate guys breaking boards with their hands. The damage to the board does not come from slowly pushing against the board; it comes from the sudden, extreme application of force. The same applies to your back.



10. Lift with your legs. I know, I know, you've heard that before. Well, it's still true. It does take some practice, because we're not used to lifting that way. However, lifting with your legs does two important things: First, it helps you to apply the tips listed above - becoming a Pole. Second, your leg muscles are much stronger than your back or arm muscles. This makes the lift safer and easier. On the other hand, this should only be done if you can straddle the load with your legs - keep the load between your knees while lifting.
11. Avoid twisting your body while lifting, moving, or setting the object down. Twisting your body transfers the weight from the "Pole" to a triangle.

12. Try to carry the load in the space between your shoulders and your waist.  
This puts less strain on your back muscles.

13. Make sure you can see over the object you're carrying. If you have to strain to see around or over the object, you're in danger.

14. Set the object down smoothly and gently, and continue to keep your back straight.

Seem like this is just too, too much trouble just to pick up something? With some practice, these tips will become second nature; you won't even realize you're following them. Ignore them, and sooner or later (probably sooner) you'll be ~~singing~~ moanin' the blues. Choose ... but choose wisely.

